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**What is Academic Rigor, What Do We Do with It?**

By: [Jordan Catapano](http://www.teachhub.com/what-academic-rigor-what-do-we-do-it)

We all know that there is a certain standard of excellence that we implicitly expect of our students. Sometimes these standards are made clear to students via examples, rubrics, directions, and instruction. Sometimes these standards are less defined.

What is essential for establishing the appropriate degree of rigor in your classroom is making sure that you overtly demonstrate to students what the expected outcome is? Here are a few key characteristics of a classroom that communicates the standards.

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| “Rigor,” in the academic sense, is referring to that fine line between challenging and frustrating a student. It means that students are challenged to think, perform, and grow to a level that they were not at previously. It means that students must work, like an athlete at a team practice, to build their skills, understanding, and thinking power so that they can achieve at higher and higher levels. It means that the standards of the course are calibrated so that students are compelled to grow, but are not frustrated and overwhelmed in the process. | |
| **Setting the Standard**  We all know that there is a certain standard of excellence that we implicitly expect of our students. Sometimes these standards are made clear to students via examples, [**rubrics**](http://www.teachhub.com/teacher-rubric-guide), directions, and instruction. Sometimes these standards are less defined. What is essential for establishing the appropriate degree of rigor in your classroom is making sure that you overtly demonstrate to students what the expected outcome is. Here are a few key characteristics of a classroom that communicates the standards. | * Total classroom environment endorses a high-degree of performance from each student. * Teacher believes in the potential for each student’s success and communicates this belief. * [**Lessons**](http://www.teachhub.com/teaching-tools/pop-lesson-plans) and tasks are designed to lead students to expected outcomes. * Examples of desired outcomes and undesired outcomes are overtly shared with students. * Students have opportunity to revise their academic attempts. * Higher-level, thought-provoking questions are asked by teacher. * High-level, thought-provoking answers are shared by students. * Teacher does not accept lower-level thinking or answers in discussion or academic tasks. |
| **Supporting Rigorous Achievement**  Not only is maintaining a high standard essential for student success, but excellent teachers must also make sure that they are supporting each and every student to move progressively toward the desired level of achievement. Teachers must consistently ensure that whatever the content or skill they are covering, they provide the requisite materials and instructional patterns. | Here are the signs of a [**classroom environment supportive for student progress**](http://www.teachhub.com/tips-creating-welcoming-classroom-environment):   * Lessons are systematically scaffolded from one to the next. * Materials are consistently organized to clearly provide instructions and demonstration of task. * Intervention tasks or instructions are regularly utilized to ensure no students are left behind. * Teacher is available for helping students individually at other points throughout the day * Parents are communicated with regularly regarding the academic goals of the course. * Learning tools are color-coded, graphically organized, reinforced, and interactive. * Content is made relevant and relatable to student background information and interest. |
| **Validation of Achievement**  It’s not enough for teachers simply to “teach” and expect students then to “learn.” The final step for true assessment of academic rigor within the classroom is for the teacher to provide students with various opportunities to demonstrate their degree of achievement in relation to the given standard. | Here are a variety of methods available for allowing students to exemplify their progress:   * A balance of formative and summative assessments intermittently provided. * Student demonstration measured using a rubric or other standard-based assessment tool. * Students allowed the opportunity to conference and revise work. * Homework and class activities thought of as “practice.” * Students work independently or collaboratively on a given project. * Students connect material to real-life examples and situations. * Students provide a written or spoken summative report. * Students metacognitively apply a variety of content learned. * Student performance compared to previous student attempts. * Students provide high-level answers to high-level questions. * Students do not give up or feel overwhelmed when faced with challenges. * Students reflect on their learning progress and efforts. |
| So what are your standards in your classroom? How are those communicated, supported, and demonstrated throughout the year? Take time to consider how “rigorous” the academic requirements are for your classroom, and shape the environment to consistently demand of students higher and higher levels of academic progress! | |